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**GENDER EQUALITY COMMITTEE
(GEC)**

Elements for a reply to the Committee of Ministers

Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2157
[“Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality”](#)

Draft Comments of the Gender Equality Committee (GEC)¹

On 25 June 2019 (22nd sitting), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 2157 “[Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality](#)”. The Committee of Ministers then forwarded it to the Gender Equality Committee (GEC) for information and any comments by 19 November.

The GEC takes note of this recommendation and wishes to submit the following comments:

With regard to **points 3 and 3.1**, it should be pointed out that the [Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023](#) comprises a new aspect compared with the 2014-2017 strategy, namely the protection of the rights of migrants, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls (Objective 5). To give full effect to this objective, under the 2020-2021 biennium, the GEC proposed drawing up a new legal instrument in this field, and draft terms of reference could be adopted by the Committee of Ministers by the end of the year with a view to setting up a Gender Equality Committee sub-committee to draft this new legal instrument. Naturally, the GEC hopes that these terms of reference will be approved.

The GEC is grateful for the increased support that several Presidencies have given to equality issues, most recently the Finnish Presidency and the current French Presidency. This has made it possible to promote more actively [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2019\)1 on preventing and combating sexism](#), an innovative international legal instrument. Both the French Presidency and Ukraine have also provided additional financial support for work on equality and combating violence against women, and the Organisation de la Francophonie has expressed a keen interest in this issue and in promoting the [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (Istanbul Convention). The GEC hopes that similar support will continue in the future. It should also be recalled that prior to 2010,² ministerial meetings on equality issues were held to promote public policies on equality at the highest level. The holding of another such conference would require an appropriate political consensus.

Mainstreaming is one of the six fundamental objectives of the Strategy. This applies not only to the policies of States but also to the bodies of the Council of Europe and their various activities. The proposal that the Committee of Ministers itself appoint a gender equality rapporteur (**point 3.2**) could not but help to ensure more effectively that this issue is taken into account at the earliest possible stage and as such deserves to be supported. These rapporteurs, now in place in nearly 50 steering committees and monitoring bodies, are an important part of the integrated arrangements within the Organisation. The role of the rapporteurs is precisely to promote the integration of a gender perspective in the work of their respective bodies.

¹ For adoption by the GEC at its 16th plenary meeting (Strasbourg, 13-15 November 2019)

² The 7th and last ministerial meeting on equality issues took place in Baku on 24 and 25 May 2010.

With regard to ensuring gender parity (**point 3.3**) in the work and decisions of the Committee of Ministers, this Assembly proposal is also in line with the Organisation's Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023, and its Objective 4, which aims to promote the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making bodies. The texts, some of which are long-standing,³ governing the functioning of subordinate committees and bodies, and the standards addressed to member States are also geared towards this end. The very recent Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism is also consistent with this objective, reiterating the need for commitments at the highest levels of organisations – see Section II.D.5, with a particular emphasis on the public sector (Chapter II.E as a whole).

The issue of non-sexist language (**point 3.4**) was specifically on the agenda of the 16th meeting of the GEC (13-15 November). It shares the Assembly's view on the need to update texts aimed at encouraging the use of inclusive vocabulary and language, not dominated by the male gender and outdated expressions (for example, using “droits humains” rather than “droits de l'homme” in French). Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 also devotes a complete chapter (II.A) to gender-neutral language and communication. [Instruction No. 33 of 1 June 1994 concerning the use of non-sexist language at the Council of Europe](#) now appears to be falling behind the practices that are changing in many countries where the Organisation's official languages are spoken. This calls for a harmonisation of practices within the Organisation. It will also be important to ensure that any text updating Instruction No. 33 is given the highest possible visibility and that it is fully taken into account. Indeed, this instruction has never been completely effective in practice, due to insufficient promotion and commitment at all levels.

The Gender Equality Division, which acts as the Secretariat for the GEC, is also responsible for co-operation activities in this field. Particular emphasis is placed on the [Istanbul Convention](#). This co-operation helps to support not only the transposition of the convention in the States Parties but also preparations for ratification by other countries (**point 3.5**). Promotion efforts are also being made (recently, for example, at high-level meetings with members of parliament in Armenia on 31 October and 1 November), and a multilateral conference is to be held in Tbilisi in April 2020. Efforts are also needed to counter attempts to call into question acquired equality rights and the dissemination of a distorted vision of the Istanbul Convention, particularly with regard to the concept of “gender”.

With regard to **points 3.6 and 3.8**: the GEC – like other steering committees – has the task of ensuring the effectiveness of the standards in its field. However, the GEC is not designed as a monitoring body (unlike the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) for example). But the revised draft terms of reference for the next biennium, if adopted, would task the GEC with giving thought to its procedures for following up the Committee of Ministers' recommendations on gender equality. In this context, mainstreaming could be an issue to be emphasised given its particular importance. In the immediate term, the GEC ensures general follow-up through its annual reports on the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy, and ad hoc follow-up exercises on a given text.⁴ On the question of resources for equality and anti-violence

³ [Resolution CM/Res\(2011\)24 on intergovernmental committees and subordinate bodies, their terms of reference and working methods](#); Recommendation [Rec\(81\)6](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the participation of women and men in an equitable proportion in committees and other bodies set up in the Council of Europe.

⁴ The last exercise carried out was the third monitoring cycle of the implementation of Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making.

issues (**point 3.6**), the GEC cannot but stress the importance of sustainable and sufficient resources for institutional arrangements, programmes and civil society organisations active in this field. Many studies have also highlighted the long-term social and economic benefits of progress towards equality and preventive measures.

The GEC is currently implementing a series of measures to promote the Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism (**point 3.7**). A special [web page](#) is dedicated to this, together with a video clip on sexism, which is being promoted in the media and on social networks. Translations and subtitling in non-official languages are being carried out with the assistance of relevant national authorities. A call for tenders has been launched for work to promote the above recommendation by NGOs in at least ten member countries. Other communication measures are planned, such as an entertaining and, at the same time, educational “quiz” on sexism to be unveiled on 25 November (World Day Against Violence Against Women).

With regard to **point 3.9**, the GEC actively promotes issues at a global level, through the participation of members of the Secretariat and its members. For example, with the support of the French Presidency, representatives took part in the work of the G20 Summit in Biarritz in August 2019 and the Council of Europe is involved in the organisation of two workshops in parallel to the next [UNECE Beijing +25 Regional Review Meeting](#) (Geneva, 29-30 October 2019). The frequency of these meetings is one of the reasons why the GEC now suggests setting up a three-person Bureau, like the other statutory committees, which would be able to ensure as actively as possible in the future, the GEC’s participation in these many important events for the continuation and co-ordination of public policies.